

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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ALEXIA.

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CHAPTER X.

MARTIN, the bailiff, a wiry, clever old man, who lived with his wife and son in a corner of the Manor House, drove down himself that afternoon to meet the Squire. He had always been fond of Mr. Charlie, and of late years had been much disappointed in him, disapproving highly of his marriage with Miss Radcliffe. As they drove through Redwood he made some remark about the wedding the next day.

"Ah, I suppose so. I came down with Mr. Rowley," said Charlie. "Is it a smart affair?"

"No, sir, quiet, from all I can hear," said Martin. "But I hears nothing. I ain't given to scandal-mongering."

"I know you're not, Martin," said Charlie. "Stop. I'll get out at the church, and you can drive on. Tell them to light a fire in the den."

In the blue cold twilight the church door stood open, at the end of a flagged path shaded by leafless lime trees. An arch of evergreens had been set up over the gate, and there was a glimmer of light inside the church.

"There's been a grand turn-out," said Martin, with a sort of grin.

"It's a grand occasion," said the Squire.

He walked slowly up the path, while Martin rattled away, and presently stood inside the door. It was a heavy, dark old church, the nave still blocked up with pews. In the choir were the seats of the scornful, finely carved, and the school-children's benches behind them. There were two or three heavy old monuments, and the usual aspect of the church was damp and dismal,

but just now it was loaded with Christmas decorations, texts in frosted letters, crosses and triangles on red cloth, stuck here and there, evergreen wreaths twining pillars and pulpit. Yards of red stuff had been laid down from the porch to the altar steps, where the bride was to walk and stand to-morrow. The good woman who had been arranging all this was now poking away at a stove in some remote corner, having left her candle burning in one of pews. It flickered in the air, and made strange moving lights and shadows in the church. Half a pillar would flash forward, and draw back into darkness again, with a weird effect: the blue misty light of the outside world gleamed in at the windows.

Charlie Melville, wrapped in his great travelling coat, walked up the aisle and stood for a few minutes in the chancel. He hardly knew why he was there, and seemed to walk in a dream. But there he stood, and stared about him, while the flickering lights caught his fair hair. Presently a deep sigh, almost a groan, escaped him, and at the same moment he became aware that the vestry door stood half-open, and that a round, anxious face was looking through.

Charlie made a step backwards, startled and disgusted: he had no idea that the Rector was in the vestry; and that Mr. Dodd should have a notion of his state of mind was the very least desirable thing. In another moment he recollected that Mr. Dodd had seen enough already, and instead of retreating, he strode forward into the vestry, where Mr. Dodd was looking over his register, arranging pens and ink for the next day.

"Preparations!" said Charlie; and he shook hands with the Rector, who stared at him with round eyes.

"A—I had no idea that you were at

Redwood," exclaimed Mr. Dodd with some hesitation.

"Just come down on business. I'm off to America next week," and then Charlie answered patiently enquiries after his mother and his wife, and ended by saying that the church looked splendid—all Mrs. Dodd's doing, he supposed.

"Christmas, you know," nodded the Rector, still with a suspicious stare. "And the decorations come in very nicely for our wedding."

"Ah—one likes to see the old church look well," said Charlie.

"You don't often see it at all now," said the Rector. "And shall you be here to-morrow? Of course Mr. Page will be delighted. Mrs. Dodd and I dine there to-night. Young Rowley is staying with us. I shall tell Mr. Page he will have another guest," said Charlie's pastor, with the air which this stray sheep of his thought vulgar impertinence.

"Thanks. I shall be much obliged if you will do no such thing," said Charlie. "I particularly don't want the Pages to know that I am here. I hate weddings. After all the fuss is over I shall have a talk with Mr. Page."

"Very well, very well; just as you please," said Mr. Dodd; and with a short farewell Charlie left the vestry and marched off down the church.

He took a short cut across the park to his lonely old house. It looked intensely sad with its many shuttered windows, the new part standing white and square and solid on a broad terrace, with a great stone portico and pillars; the old part, red, uneven, timbered, gabled, half-hidden in ivy on which a frosty mist was already gathering, stretching round towards the yew hedges, and long walks, and old walls of the garden. In the centre gable one latticed window, unshuttered, was shining red and cheerful through the ivy. Mrs. Martin had lighted the fire in Charlie's den. His dinner was ready in the library, where he generally lived when he came to Redwood now. He finished it off in very quick time, though Mrs. Martin, who was a good cook, had done her best, and then went along the winding passages and up the old polished staircase to the den.

There he hunted round the room, and collected a few shabby treasures, dusty, moth-eaten, faded—a certain small case of humming-birds, a drawer of foreign butterflies, two or three old scrap-books, a blue velvet smoking-cap, which a girl's fingers had

embroidered—these, with a few more sad relics, he laid out in a row on the table, and looked at them one by one. Then he pulled up the old armchair, where the hare in startled hopelessness still gazed after the tortoise, and sat down in front of the fire and smoked a few cigarettes, staring at the blaze all the time in a sort of gloomy dream.

In this way he occupied the evening till nearly ten o'clock. Then he roused himself, went downstairs, got his hat and coat, and went out into the brilliant star-shine.

All the world was white with frost now; the blue steely glimmer of twilight was intensified. There was a deep, profound stillness, the grass and leaves crackled under Charlie's feet as he walked across the park. Presently he turned into the road, and strolled down, keeping rather in the shadow of the hedges, till he found himself opposite the Old Farm. Here there was no stillness; lights were flashing everywhere; red gleams seemed to make their way through curtains, through chinks of shutters; the dogs, kept awake by the unusual bustle, were barking in the yard, and merry music came sounding out across the garden. Sometimes Charlie, standing perfectly still at the gate, could hear peals of laughter, which told him how happy they all were, how Alexia's troubles were all over now, how she was thoroughly contented with her fate, and thankful, not sorry for the past. He smiled to himself rather bitterly, and thought it did not take much to console a woman. He almost felt as if he hated Alexia, as another scream of girlish laughter rang across the garden; but still he stood there, leaning on the gate, as if it had been summer, quite unable to go away, yet resolving that he would go back to town by the first train in the morning, for he knew now that the sight of her marriage would be more than he could bear. Four years ago—why, the feeling he had for Alexia then was not worth calling love. This agony—this wrong, hopeless, terrible passion, was a very different thing. If he had felt like this, then, she would never have refused him. No doubt it was all very contemptible—he despised himself—his mother had been right when she advised him not to go down to Redwood. Life was an awful thing, Charlie meditated. Here he was, not fifty yards from Alexia, and yet seas and mountains were nothing to the worlds of impossibility between her and him.

He stood there till the door in the deep

porch opened, and a whole wave of light, warmth, happiness, seemed to roll out across the garden. Mr. and Mrs. Dodd came out; they were going to walk home under the stars. Mrs. Dodd's voice sounded quite sweet and musical as she wished Mr. Page good-night.

"Now, Mr. Rowley!" said Mr. Dodd; and when they had nearly reached the gate, the dark slender figure of the bridegroom overtook them. They all walked away together down the road, while Charlie moved a few steps the other way: no one saw him, or dreamed that he was there.

Very soon the Old Farm was quiet after these guests were gone; the dogs fell asleep, the doors and windows were darkened. Then came out a square of light in one of the gables by the porch. Charlie knew very well whose room that was: he had looked up at the window often and anxiously enough, four years ago. Now he stood, and gazed, and watched perhaps for an hour or more, while a shadow now and then crossed the square of light. Then at last it too was darkened, and he turned away and tramped home to the Manor.

Martin was sitting up for him, and a good fire was still burning in the den. Charlie sat over it smoking and warming himself, for the romance of the evening had been freezing work after all. Then, before he went to bed, he made such a blaze in that old chimney as it had never known before, for he piled up a great fire and threw all his old treasures on the top of it, humming-birds, butterflies, with their drawers and cases, scrap-books, even the blue velvet smoking-cap. They caught fire and flamed, roaring up the chimney, and Charlie, having made his sacrifice, went off to his own room and left them blazing.

CHAPTER XI.

EDMUND ROWLEY'S sisters, like himself, worshipped Alexia, and could not see or imagine any fault in her. His mother, though fond of her, was not quite so enthusiastic. She was a most straightforward woman, but also narrow-minded, and not always sympathetic. She had a certain standard for people's feelings and manners at special occasions in their lives. She expected a good deal, and on the whole she was not satisfied with Alexia's behaviour the night before her wedding. When following events astonished everybody else, Mrs. Rowley drew herself up and said she was not surprised. Nor was Mr. Page, though he did not confess it; but he had

reasons which, at that time at least, were quite hidden from his sister. Her penetration was so much the more remarkable.

Alexia was certainly a little odd that evening, Mrs. Rowley thought. Marriage was a solemn thing: and here was the girl chattering all kinds of nonsense, sending Mr. Dodd into fits of laughter, laughing herself as if a serious thought had never crossed her brain, so that Mrs. Dodd opened her eyes and smiled condescendingly, and Edmund looked a little wondering, and his mother looked graver and crosser every minute. Mr. Page looked on placidly, without saying much; but he was watching Alexia all the time; none of her jokes, none of her changing humours, were lost on him. For her behaviour was made odder still, in her aunt's eyes, by a sudden fit now and then of silence and absence. She would sit looking at nothing, while her cousins laughed and chattered on; somebody would speak to her, and she would not answer for a minute or two. These shadows of thoughtfulness might have pleased Mrs. Rowley, but she was not so easily satisfied. She wanted a gentle consistency, not running into any foolish extremes, and that night Alexia was not quite herself, and could not give it her.

There was something a little odd too, when Mr. and Mrs. Dodd were gone, in the hurried, half-dreamy good-night that Alexia wished them all, not listening to her aunt's appropriate remarks, or to the affectionate raptures of the girls, but going straight away to her own room and locking the door.

"I suppose Alexia will be down again presently, William," said Mrs. Rowley, when all the young people were gone, sitting upright on the old sofa by the drawing-room fire.

"No, I don't suppose she will," said Mr. Page. "She said good-night: she is tired: I hope she will go to bed at once."

"One would have thought—" said Mrs. Rowley—she paused, and then went on, as he waited patiently, "I expected that you and she would have a good deal to say to each other, this last evening."

William Page stood on the hearthrug, looking quietly straight before him, and stroking his face.

"I don't know what," he said presently. "We understand each other. She knew I wanted her to go to bed."

"But on such an occasion," persisted Mrs. Rowley with a forbearing smile, "a father might wish to give his child some good advice."

"Oh no," he said. "Alex does very well without advice from me."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Rowley: but she perceived that it was best to say no more, and she went to bed soon after in a disapproving frame of mind.

William was weak. He had been weak about his wife; he was just as weak about his daughter, and had certainly brought her up in a foolish spirit of wilful independence. How about Edmund's happiness? His mother felt anxious, and was inclined to go herself to Alexia's room with a small store of good advice, taking up the responsibility her father shirked. But she gave up this plan, thinking that William might be annoyed, and reminding herself, for she was a kind and just woman at heart, of all Alexia's sweetness during the three years of the engagement. After all, it was impossible not to love her, though she might puzzle and provoke one sometimes; and Edmund's mother lay down in charity with Alexia.

I suppose people who believe much in magnetism will not find it hard to understand that Alexia had been visited several times that evening, and finally driven to her room, by a feeling of intense and awful misery, of terror and despair, by a thronging crowd of old thoughts and recollections, which she had honestly done her very best to get rid of and escape from altogether. It was too cruel and terrible of them to come back now, "a midnight host of spectres pale"—now, when it was too late to listen to them, when their very presence was becoming sinful. Ah! it had nearly always been that, in one way: and the struggle had gone on bravely for years. Sometimes the victory had seemed to be quite gained; the old feeling was asleep, if not dead, and Charlie's name was no more to her than any other man's. She had great power over her own heart and mind, like every woman who is worth much, and there were things which she would not remember or think of. For months she would resolve and fight successfully, never consciously letting herself be disloyal in one thought to Edmund: then would come a day or a night of failure, when the battle must be fought over again from the beginning. Often at these times she had nearly written to him to break off their engagement; but she conquered in the fight again, and the old love went to sleep, and she felt quite sure that this time it would die. Why should it come back again to-night, of all nights in a lifetime, and with a wild

strength which frightened and maddened her, so that she crouched down on the sofa in her room, and, with clenched hands, and brow pressed hard against the cushions, found herself panting out words in spite of herself—"Charlie—Charlie—I love you—I wish I was dead! Oh! why can't I die?" Mrs. Rowley, it seems, was not quite unjustified in her fears for her son's happiness.

For two hours, perhaps, Alexia lay there in this strain of nervous agony, without movement, except a shiver now and then. Her brain was on fire, and all the past came back with a new vividness. There was a bright light upon it all now, and it showed her, as she had never seen it before, the one great mistake that was ruining her poor little life. That mistake, made in a moment of excitement, of self-distrust and cowardice, into what depths might it not plunge her now! Would there be any help, could there ever have been, in pledging her whole life and affection to one man, when it was too awfully plain to herself that they were for ever given to another? No; by that worse than foolish engagement she had made everything ten times harder, by making herself false. Through these last miserable years—this moment of truth showed what they had really been—she had been living in a lie; and now, to-morrow, in a few hours, she was going to bind herself to live in it for ever. No; she could not and would not do it. It was not yet too late. There, alone in her room with the dying fire, she saw at last what was right, and thought it would be easy to do it. As for sleeping to-night, of course that was impossible. She would get up very early in the morning, and go to her father; he was sure to be early too. He would understand; he would help her; she knew in her heart that he had never been deceived, like other people, and had never been really glad of her engagement. He would be on her side; he would tell them all, and make it easy for her. Of course everybody would be angry, but what did that matter! Oh for freedom and peace again, to belong to herself, and to no one else in the world! Why, what a madness it had been, to think of escaping from danger by chaining herself in a prison. What an unworthy cowardice, what a mean suspicion of herself and Charlie! In this "foundering of the ship," for so it was to poor little Alexia, she blamed herself for everything she had ever done, and told herself that she had been false and cowardly

from the beginning. Why, why, should wrong ever have seemed right, and right wrong! Going back four years, a life-time ago, yet as near as yesterday, she told herself that she ought to have been true to Charlie then. After all, their lives and hearts were their own; she had no reason to doubt him then, and she knew that with her whole soul she belonged to him. It was all her doing. Cowardice, again, had put on the mask of unselfishness, and when his mother asked her to give him up, she had done it without a struggle. And here were the consequences: both their lives turned into a miserable lie! However, it was no use going back so far: what was done could not be undone. No; but what was still undone need not be done. She need not be false to herself for ever; she could yet be true, and free. Not happy herself, or making others happy; but at least she need not carry lies into the future, by submitting quietly to the fate that was so near, and pretending to give away what did not belong to her. "Free, free, I shall be free!" she could say to herself now, and in the calm of this new resolution she fell asleep there on the sofa, her light evening dress all crushed and crumpled, and her wild curls buried in the pillow.

After some time she woke suddenly, with a start, and sat up shivering, for the fire was nearly out, and she had gone to sleep without anything to cover her.

All the excitement had passed away now; she was her ordinary, straightforward, sensible self again; the storm was over, and the wild dreams were almost forgotten. For the first few moments she sat still, feeling a little strange and vague. Something had happened, or was going to happen, she hardly knew what: then the tall old clock downstairs struck two, its solemn bell resounding through the house, and she remembered that this was the morning of her wedding day. She was going to light a candle, thinking that she might as well undress and go to bed now; but then, clearly and quietly, and from quite a different point of view, she began thinking of that resolution made before she fell asleep, and she did not move at once, but sat on in the darkness with her head upon her hands, thinking this thought out. For there was another point of view. Last night she had seen things solely from her own; this morning she remembered that there was some one else to be considered, another human being with a heart and soul, as well as herself, a creature who per-

fectly trusted her, whose whole world she was, and to whose love and faithfulness she was going to give a mortal wound. It certainly was with a thrill of shame and pain that she confessed it to herself—in that glorious plan of escape, that brave resolution to do right and to be free, she had quite forgotten to think what Edmund might feel.

This was a case of conscience indeed, and Edmund's claim advanced itself with overwhelming strength. If you can only save your own life by killing another person, whose trust in you is perfect—why! Was it the doing of a selfish or of a generous nature, to have gone to her lover for refuge and safety, to have accepted all he had to give, and then, when the time came for keeping her promises, to draw back, to say she must live free, or not at all, to throw back his love and trust in his face, telling him that she had changed her mind?—for the real reason was not a reason that could be told. This would surely be the meanest thing she had ever done, this escape from the consequences of her own actions—buying peace and freedom for herself at the cost of Edmund's happiness. No; if she could do nothing else that was brave, she could carry out her sacrifice, and could at least be outwardly true to him. In her waking senses, cold, tired, and calm, she knew that there was no real need to fear the future. "I will be faithful; I will not be a wicked woman; and, if I can help it, I will never think of Charlie again."

She said these words on her knees: and then she said her prayers, which she had forgotten at night, and a sort of quiet happiness came over her. Poor Alexia! Which of her resolutions was the right one, after all?

WHAT IT MUST COME TO.

ONE by one the historic châteaux of France are passing into the hands of the rich bourgeoisie. As the English traveller journeys through the country, guide-book in hand, this fact naturally escapes his observation. He sees a splendid old pile from the railway, and identifies it with the description given by Murray; he obtains sight of a famous bit of architecture in another, a celebrated garden belonging to a third; and there the matter ends. Of the social transformation that has come over these palatial dwellings of the olden time, he learns nothing. Only those who live in France among French

people realise history as it is being written there under their own eyes.

Last autumn I happened to be the guest of a country gentleman residing on his own estate in the Angoumois. Perhaps I should use the definition gentleman farmer, since M. Hervé attended to the business of farming upwards of a thousand acres himself, went regularly to market, kept his own accounts, and dispensed altogether with the services of steward or bailiff. Busy as he was, however, and rural as were his tastes, he yet found time to show me all that was most worth seeing in the neighbourhood; he was also, like most of his country people, full of local information. Under his roof I wanted, therefore, neither guide-book nor departmental geography. Everything a stranger wanted to know he could tell me.

"I propose, this afternoon," he said one day at déjeuner, "to drive you to Château Roman; quite the most curious thing to be seen in our department."

"Château Roman? Château Roman?" I asked. "The place has surely some other name, for neither our English Murray, nor your own Joanne, so much as makes the slightest allusion to such a place."

"The fact is," my host continued, as he quietly cut up a turkey no larger than a spring chicken—why we keep our turkeys till they are as big as sheep, I cannot conceive—"the fact is—I hope you like truffles!—Château Roman was formerly known as Château Chabot-Charny, so called after that noble family—permit me, a glass of Sauterne—who gave so many steadfast adherents to the Protestant cause in France. The last of the house dying without issue, the château changed owners many times, finally passing into the hands of a rich speculator—allow me, a little salad?—and he has turned it into a *fabrique de romans*, a novel manufactory."

"A novel manufactory?" I cried, dropping knife and fork.

"Certainly," he said, "a veritable *fabrique de romans*. We have a great variety of manufactures in these parts, indeed, I may say, throughout the entire country. Pill factories, picture factories—shoes, shirts, spectacles, you can hardly mention an article, either for use or ornament, that we do not now make by machinery in France. Machine-made work is not only cheaper, more expeditious than anything of the kind to be turned out by hand, it is so superior, so undeniably superior."

My host, though the most practical man

in the world, could yet thoroughly appreciate a joke when it came in his way. I see at once, therefore, that he was not making fun of me now. He went on quite naturally, "The name may sound odd to you, perhaps—une *fabrique de romans*! Yes, I admit that when one hears of it for the first time one might suppose the whole thing to be a hoax. But reflect for a moment. There is nothing in the least laughable about the matter. Books of other kinds have long since been made by machinery—diaries, almanacks, catechisms, manuals of devotion, cookery-books, song-books, dictionaries, and works of reference of various sorts. Newspapers, too, up to a certain point, may be said to be manufactured. Youths are now regularly apprenticed to the journalistic trade as to any other. Where, then, is the incongruity? Machine-made novels are not only cheaper than hand-made, but better adapted to the requirements of the age. I certainly prefer them myself. As I say, then, we will drive this afternoon and look over the whole concern."

"Then Château Roman is an appropriate name," I said.

"Above all, a name easy to remember! In these days of telegraph, telephone, and all the rest of it, a colossal undertaking like that of this *fabrique de romans* must not only be à propos, but unmistakably, named. Now, out of the scores of places, the names of which begin with Château in France, there is none that could possibly be confused with Château Roman. The name, too, speaks for the thing. Any fool must know what it means. Jean," here my host turned to the dexterous young fellow waiting at table, a rustic, yet clever and handy, "Jean, the pony carriage and the mare, if you please, at half-past one o'clock to go to Château Roman."

Château Roman forms a striking object as the traveller speeds by railway through the heart of the Angoumois. High above the dark river tumbling over its rocky bed, high above old-world tower, hanging gardens and smiling valley, high above frowning granite peak and rich chestnut woods, it rises in all its primitive massiveness and splendour. The vast pile is built of the dark grey limestone of the district, shining with a metallic lustre in the bright September sunshine, and with its lofty towers surmounted by pinnacles, its oubliettes and ramparts, still recalls the

gloomy fortified castle of the Middle Ages. A cradle of tragedy, rather than comedy, it looked, whence should issue novels as terrible as any invention of human fancy.

"You observe that, as far as possible, the historic aspect of the place has been preserved," my host said. "To do that was a patriotic duty; but my neighbour, the enterprising director, felt it incumbent upon him to show such respect to the exterior only. Inside—the place was fast falling to ruin, so that it was absolutely necessary to do something—you will find all modern, lightsome, airy. The outlook at the back too, where a part of the old wall has been pulled down, is quite charming. You can see over half the department."

We drove on for another mile or so under the overarching plane trees, then the road took a sudden bend, and we were making straight for the portcullis.

"You will wonder, I dare say," my host said, "that the head of such a concern as this should not be a lady. My countrywomen, as all the world knows, are largely gifted with the administrative faculty. Unfortunately, however, few of them have as yet that amount of general knowledge, above all, that literary experience necessary in the directors of a *fabrique de romans*, a novel manufactory. The physical as well as mental strain also, involved in the management of so complicated a business, would overtax the powers of most women. Now in the person of Monsieur Quarante—but here we are."

The mere shell of the frowning portcullis was of course all that was left. The vast courtyard was open, and we drove straight across to the *conciergerie* or porter's lodge. Immediately a couple of employés came running out, and from the attention we received I could easily see how well my host stood in general estimation hereabouts.

"I have brought a friend to look over the establishment," he said to the man at the mare's head. "Can we see Monsieur the director, think you?"

"Monsieur the director won't refuse you," replied the man, "but he is overwhelmed with business just now."

"Trade is pretty brisk, then?" asked M. Hervé, as he watched the pair of grooms take out the carriage.

"Brisker than ever," answered the other. "If everything sold like novels, we should hear of no more honest folk wanting bread in France."

The mare was then led to the stables, and we betook ourselves to the director's office, I meantime glancing to the right and to the left, above and below.

The interior of the quadrangle presented a striking contrast to the façade. Whilst the latter had been preserved in all its pristine picturesqueness and splendour, within everything had been sacrificed to utility, agreeableness, and health. In fact, only the shell of the mediæval château remained. Its appearance inside was that of any ordinary manufactory. Bureaux of the various departments, post office, offices of telegraph and telephone, occupied the ground floor; above, the large, lofty, well-ventilated ateliers showed a busy, yet quiet multitude at work. The one feature indeed distinguishing this factory from any other was the absence of deafening noises. Neither mill-wheel, steam engine, nor hammer grated harshly on the ear, there was only the sound of people moving about and hushed voices.

"Good day, M. Hervé, my respects to you," said the cheerful, bustling, as it seemed to me, somewhat overdone director. "So you have brought this gentleman to see over the manufactory? Nothing easier! I only wish I had more time at your disposal."

M. Hervé placed his hand on the other's shoulder with that almost affectionate cordiality which is permitted in France.

"Come, no ceremony among old friends. If you are really occupied, let us be consigned to one of your clerks."

"No such thing, not for worlds; on no account whatever," was the hearty answer. "I regret that I cannot show your friend over every department, but I will conduct you to the most important. Sit down, gentlemen; have the goodness to sit down for five minutes, two minutes, one minute, then I will be ready."

We sat down. M. Quarante, with extraordinary expedition, then opened half-a-dozen telegrams just brought in, pencilled a word on each, numbered them for transmission to their respective departments, and dismissed the porter. Next he drew forth a telegram form, and sat for a moment, with pen behind his ear, in deep thought. Finally he rose, laid an impatient hand on the paper.

"Everything in the ordinary line of business is easy enough," he said, looking half distracted. "It is these accidents, these unexpected dilemmas, that are so difficult to cope with—conceive, for instance, the awkwardness of the situation."

We have just turned out an order for the country, and, as requested, each story was to have a quiet murder in it—nothing horrible, you know; horrors are not in fashion just now. But as ill-luck would have it, a real murder of most audacious nature has happened in those parts, and people are so nervous that they won't read anything to remind them of it; they won't have anything in the murder way at all. So our thirty serials are shunted till Heaven knows when, and I must supply thirty more within four-and-twenty hours."

"I presume," my host said, kindly interviewing the director for my benefit, "I presume you do a good stroke of business with the country newspapers?"

"The very thews and sinews of war, sir; but for the country newspapers our hands would be thrown out of work like the silk-weavers at Lyons. Newspapers have increased enormously of late years. Nowadays, thanks to the division of parties, every little town has half-a-dozen, and each has its own serial story."

"Do financial and other crises affect your business much?" asked my host again, on the alert to obtain information for me.

"Not in the least. There was the war with Prussia and the siege of Paris, for instance. One might have supposed that when people had neither bite nor sup, and the enemy was at their very doors, they would not have felt much interest in novels. Quite the contrary. The more depressed and miserable folks were, the more avidity they showed for fiction. On my word, it was as much as we could do to supply the demand."

"In the way of exports, now?" inquired M. Hervé.

"Ah! there you hit another nail on the head. Our export trade is, after all, what really keeps us going. You see, Germany cuts into our home manufactures in cutlery, woollen stuffs, toys. Belgium undersells us in the matter of ironware and machinery. We cannot compete, or anything like compete, with English cotton goods, hardware, comestibles of all kinds; but confound them all—a thousand pardons, sir—I defy them all to hurt our novel trade. We do a good deal with Russia (a special manufacture that), the Argentine Republic, Buenos Ayres, the Brazils, Cochin China, and Zanzibar. These countries stand first; but small steady orders come in from various parts of the world. The Steam Navigation Companies come to us, especially at certain seasons of the year, and then—bless my

soul, I was very near forgetting Japan! We do more with Japan every year. Then I was very near forgetting that, too, the religious orders are excellent customers. You see, priests and monks cannot read their breviary all day long; they may be as pious as Thomas Aquinas himself, but they must amuse themselves sometimes. Again, the hospitals, lunatic asylums, and prisons, you would never believe how many novels sick people, crazy people, and thieves and murderers read! Of course, the more we manufacture the cheaper we can do it."

"You hinted just now at a special manufacture for the Russian market?" asked my host. "Is it indiscreet to ask an explanation of that remark?"

"By no means, not in the very least," was the reply. "I am entirely at your service. Well, Russia, you see, is in a very critical condition just now. People may not write about certain subjects; anything in the way of revolutionary doctrine is tabooed. But in our novels we may plot as much as we please; and we do plot with a vengeance, I can tell you. You understand then, we give a flavouring of Socialism in the article made up for the Russian market."

"And—humph—I imagine from what I have read of them, that your novels are highly moral?" added M. Hervé.

"That they are, I warrant you. The fact is, let folks say what they will, bad morals, as far as novels are concerned, are no longer the fashion in France. I say nothing of Paris, I speak of the country in general. I am a husband and a father myself, and, if novel manufacturing meant the propagation of vice, I should set to work to fabricate pills or chassepôts instead. I don't say there is no wickedness, levity, or crime in our novels. Would they read like real life without? But we punish them, sir, soundly too, as I am sorry to say they are seldom punished in reality; whilst as to the virtuous, they live like our forefathers in Paradise! This is one reason why people like our novels. Justice is dealt all round. Well, now for our survey."

He dashed off his reply to the telegram before alluded to; with equal expedition wrote a couple of orders for transmission to two departments; dispatched all three, then led us to a commodious lift-room.

"Do all your hands live on the premises?" asked M. Hervé, when we had taken our seats.

"All, without exception. Of course the most rigid supervision is exercised. The

slightest infringement of decorum, the breaking of a single rule entails summary dismissal. We are now then in the ladies' department," he said, as we were landed on the second storey. "Yonder is the bureau of the directress, here the ateliers. Number One is the millinery department."

We both expressed so much astonishment at this latter piece of information that our guide felt bound to explain himself.

"I suppose it strikes few people how essential is a knowledge of millinery in the manufacture of a novel! But the truth is that readers, especially country readers, and those of little general instruction, delight in nothing so much as to be told what people wear! The heroine's dress, upon important occasions, is often the really most interesting feature about her, and who so fit to describe ladies' dresses as ladies themselves? Given situation, age, complexion, nationality, epoch, and there you are! Note, too, the inevitable superiority of the machine-made novel in this respect. We get the thing done by an expert, whilst novelists on their own account, of the female sex, may be dowdies, and, therefore, quite incapable of turning out a well-dressed woman on paper; if of the other, they are sure to make absurd blunders."

He opened the door of the atelier, and we glanced in without disturbing its occupants. It was a vast, well-lighted, airy apartment, in aspect not unlike the reading-room of a provincial library. In the centre was a large table covered with illustrated magazines, fashion books, and society journals; whilst around, placed at intervals of a yard or two, and shut off one from the other by a screen, were a score of small tables. At each sat a lady, neatly dressed in black, busily writing. For the most part these writers were middle-aged, and of that elegant yet staid appearance we find in the assistants of large shops in Paris. Handsome bookshelves, filled with works of reference, occupied every bit of available wall space. Not a sound was heard but the scratching of a pen, or the turning over of leaves. The director closed the door gently, and we walked on a few steps.

"Every indulgence is shown our hands out of working hours, but absolute silence is obligatory inside the atelier," he said. "You see, my countrywomen are so fond of discussion, and naturally so sociable that, if this rule were once relaxed, the place would become a perfect Babel. We now come to another field given up to the sex, that is, the love-making department."

"Is this invariably the case?" asked my host, looking extremely interested. Being a bachelor and a prodigious novel-reader, his fancy was tickled by this last piece of information.

"Invariably," rejoined M. Quarante. "You see, ladies love this sort of thing, and the younger they are, and the less they know about it, the better they do their work. It stands to reason. Take myself, for instance, on the treadmill of business from morning till night, with daughters to provide for, sons to start in life, how on earth could I sit down to write a love scene for a novel? Now, these young ladies—all the hands in this department are young—are naturally romantic, and it is the easiest thing in the world for them to imagine one love scene after another. It is wonderful how well they do it! At least so our customers say. Of course, I consult the general taste in everything."

He opened the door of the second atelier and revealed to us much the same scene as before. Except in one particular. All the occupants of the writing-tables here were young, and some very pretty.

"*Mon Dieu!*" whispered my host, "I should like to go round this room; mightn't we do it on tiptoe, now?"

The good-natured director smiled compliance, and all three, speaking only in whispers, and on tiptoe, so that our creaking boots might not disturb the fair workers, slowly made the circuit of the room. M. Hervé lagged behind sadly. By the time we were at the farther end he was only in the middle, and when we had reached the door again he had only just turned the corner. Indeed, so fascinated was he by the spectacle, that our conductor had all the difficulty in the world to get him out of the room again.

The young ladies, I must say, behaved remarkably well under the trying ordeal. They plied their pens as if unaware of our intrusion, away they scribbled automatically, more like writing machines than creatures of flesh and blood. Only one turned her head!

"A very handsome girl, that, in the corner," observed M. Hervé, when at last we had succeeded in getting him out of the atelier. The girl he spoke of was the one who had turned her head.

"Handsome or ugly, it is all one to us," replied M. Quarante coolly. "Good looks here, moreover, are less of a snare than you might suppose. Many of our male hands are married, and, as I said before, nothing

in the shape of light conduct is permitted for a moment."

"From what class do you recruit these young ladies?" I ventured to ask.

"As a rule they are certificated students, daughters of middle-class parents who, provided with their diploma, have to make their own way in the world. They generally quit us to join the staff of a newspaper or to take a Professorship of Belles Lettres at some lycées for girls. The training they get here is invaluable to them in after life. Then—only time presses too much for me to show you all—there is the geographical or picturesque department. That also we hand over to the ladies. People in novels, you see, like people in real life, must live somewhere, and it is very desirable that their place of abode should be accurately described. Descriptions of Touraine, for instance, must in a novel read like Touraine, not Auvergne or the Jura Mountains; towns, rivers, geological formation—how important, how necessary is extreme accuracy here! Our ladies have every facility, gazetteers, maps, works of travel, and often—that they like immensely—we despatch them on a journey to some especial place in order to describe it from personal observation. These hands are extremely well paid. Music again: the musical section is entirely given up to the fair sex. It seldom happens that a novel can be called complete without some music in it; a musical party is wanted, or details of some vocalist's début, and so on, and so on. All this we get done by trained specialists, often pupils of the Conservatoire. Again, the subject of etiquette forms a separate department, managed by a small staff of experienced ladies: not young these, mostly retired actresses—as we say in France, of a certain age. In a dramatic country like our own, where the peasants and the smallest roturier, are constantly rising in the social scale, where the little shopkeeper of to-day may be the great personage of to-morrow, novels would be nowhere unless they are authorities on the subject of etiquette. Our country readers delight in nothing so much as elaborate accounts of dinner-parties, dances, ceremonies, and social entertainments of all kinds, so we put in as many as possible, and omit nothing in the way of information that may be useful. Once more, there is what is called æsthetics—in other words, artistic furniture, upholstery, the proper arrangement of a room. This, like etiquette, is a very popular theme in novels; so useful, you see, to self-made

people who are going into a big house and don't know how to furnish it, any more than to behave in it when they get there. Would you like to see this last-named department?"

"Humph—I suppose—may I ask—are these ladies young?" asked M. Hervé.

"Of various ages, middle-aged, most of them; retired teachers with an aptitude for literature. They have a most valuable library of reference, and in their way are very learned. We get much praised for the descriptions of interiors in our novels. Well, as you don't seem specially anxious to see the ladies at work, we will take the lift and go a storey higher."

"Here," began M. Quarante, as we alighted on the third storey, "are three highly-important departments, the legal, the medical, and the police. I should rather say two, since the detection of crime comes within the scope of law and medicine. We have first-rate men for this work, and a pleasant time they have of it, I assure you. Much easier to get clients through law-suits, cure them of mortal diseases, track down thieves, murderers, and revolutionists on paper here than in real life! And what blunders novelists on their own account make when they attempt such matters! Readers who want accuracy must come to us."

My host did not testify any lively interest in M. Quarante's first-rate men, nor, in truth, was there anything remarkable about their appearance. They looked very cheerful over their work, as well they might. Many a briefless barrister and struggling medical man would thankfully exchange the realities of his profession for the easy tasks of the Château Roman.

"We used, in former days, to do a good deal in the poison way," said our conductor as we continued our survey; "the fashion is, however, changed, and readers now prefer to see people in novels die a natural death. Duelling, however, is still in high favour, and here our medical writers come in very handy. They know where the ball will prove fatal, and where it won't. Well, next for philosophy and literature. We have much more need of these now than formerly. Our customers like to be told in their stories what the learned read, and how they talk. Of course we don't treat all novels alike. Some contain no philosophy or literature properly speaking, but all make mention of books. We always allude to the libraries when describing our country houses, and are very particular as to the

books named. Immorality, atheism, vulgarity, we will have nothing to do with. Then, little conversations about books—country folks delight in that sort of thing; it is really a kind of education for them. You see, there are many points to consider in the manufacture of a novel."

The philosophic and literary staff of the establishment was small. We only found half-a-dozen gentlemen plying their pens in the service of these important subjects. The next department, however, was like a bee-hive.

"Ah!" cried our director, "I was very nearly forgetting one of the most important sections of all, that of Nomenclature. No one who has not himself gone into the business would believe the trouble that names give in novels; Christian names, surnames, names of places, names of residences. Where you consider that each novel requires thirty or more names, and that we manufacture dozens in a week, you will not wonder at seeing so many employes at work here."

"On what principle do you select your names?" asked M. Hervé.

He had been a little absent since that glimpse of the handsome girl in the corner, but was now recovering animation.

"At the head of this department," replied M. Quarante, "we have an experienced critic and littérateur, who is supposed to be cognisant of every novel that has ever been written in the polite languages of Europe—"

"Heavens!" cried M. Hervé, "what a capacious memory that man must have!"

"It is the business of this gentleman's subordinates," continued our director, "to furnish him with a list of all the Christian and surnames proposed for every novel put in hand. He just glances down the column and strikes out all that are hackneyed or commonplace."

"And the names of the stories themselves?" I ventured to enquire.

"That is not so difficult a matter as at first sight you might imagine. The same official sees to it. In nine cases out of ten the name of the hero, heroine, or place in which either resides will suffice. If this expedient fails, the first and last chapters of the book are skimmed, and some phrase extracted that will do duty as a title. People are not over particular as to titles of novels. After all, call it what you will, it is a novel we give them. They know that well enough."

"There is one other question I should

like to put if not impertinent," said my host. "You show us the ingredients and the kitchen, but where is the head cook? Who puts the story together?"

"Ah! the plot. I have been expecting that question all along. Oddly enough, this part of the business gives us the least trouble of any. Plots, in the accepted sense of the word, are no longer obligatory; they may indeed be said to be out of date altogether, as far as the domestic novel is concerned. Take hand-made novels for instance. A girl shilly-shallies with a man she cares about through one volume; marries another she doesn't care about in a second; is miserable in a third. There is your plot. That is the true American style. Of course we sometimes get large orders for sensational stories. People like them in winter, when trade is dull or during a cholera epidemic. Creepy stories then enliven their spirits. Well, you will smile when I inform you that I concoct the plots myself."

"Heavens!" again ejaculated M. Hervé.

"I am in the position of a bonnet manufacturer," pursued the director. "A bonnet manufacturer could not make a bonnet to save his life. He does not in the least know how he should feel in a bonnet, or why one bonnet pleases and another does not. That is precisely my case. I could not write a novel if my very existence depended upon it. I can't conceive how people feel who care for novels or who write them, but I know what will sell and what won't. What I do is this: I just keep my eyes open, read the newspapers, glance at the reviews, jot down in a note-book any uncommon incident I read or hear of, and in this way accumulate an enormous, an inexhaustible supply of raw material. Then once a week I talk over matters with my literary staff, and they put a certain number of novels in hand. Sometimes we turn out a hundred a week."

"Is it possible?" asked M. Hervé, "and each unlike the other?"

"No, I won't say that. Novel readers are not so over-particular as to require that. I often wonder seeing how much one story is like another, why readers should not take a novel as they do a husband or a wife, for once and for all, and read it over and over again as long as they live. It would really be the same thing in the end, although, fortunately for us, they do not think so."

We had now descended to the ground floor and re-entered the director's bureau.

"This is the raw material I spoke of just now," he said, pointing to a little library of albums in glass bookshelves. "Here you will see every incident we can possibly need arranged alphabetically."

He took down a volume at random and as he turned over the pages read the heads of the subjects therein treated: "Marriages, a marriage in a prison—ah! that is a newspaper cutting. Marriage of a French officer in Algeria and a Moorish girl (by the way, we do a good deal in Algeria and make up a special article for the colony), that was a fact I heard of. Marriage followed by divorce within four-and-twenty hours—extract from a trial that. Marriage on a death-bed—the incident happened in this very village; and so on, and so on. Now I take down another volume. Wills! ah, where would novel manufacturers be without wills? This volume is entirely made up of newspaper cuttings on the subject of wills, and a very curious collection it is; we are constantly having recourse to it. Again, the next volume I open is devoted to Law-suits; you observe many of the extracts here are made in writing. People are very fond of going to law in France, and everybody has heard of a dozen cases in his own family."

He ran his eye along the shelf, and added: "Murders, Accidents, Duels, Quarrels, Polish Counts—and so on, and so on—well, you have here an epitome of modern French fiction. And of course we add to our stock-in-trade every day."

My friend now glanced at me, as much as to say, was my curiosity satisfied? It really seemed to me as if we had interviewed the obliging director long enough. Yet I ventured to put one question more.

"And your opinion, Monsieur le Directeur, as to the respective merits of the two articles—the machine-made versus the hand-made article?"

"You have it, sir, in a few words. The advantage is altogether on our side. In former days, when novel-writing was confined to men and women of genius, it was all very well, but the spread of education and literature has altered this. People sit down to write novels nowadays, who are no more fitted for the task than the King of the Cannibal Islands. They do it for money, just as we do. What is the result? We can turn out a very superior article at a fraction of the cost, grammar irreproachable, facts all correct, incidents true to nature, morals attended to, and everything

made to hang properly together. Beside which—mark the fact—as we are not paid like the individual writer, by the piece, we make our stories as short as we please. Not a line is added just for the sake of making them longer."

"There is a great deal in that," said I.

"To tell you plain truth," put in my host, "that is why I have long since given up the hand-made for the machine-made novels. The padding in the former became at last insupportable to me. But good day, good day, M. le Directeur, a thousand thanks for your kind reception."

"I only regret that I have not more time to give you," said M. Quarante as he accompanied us to the door of his bureau. "Ah, what a charming afternoon for a drive! I envy you, gentlemen, who read novels instead of having to fabricate them. Au revoir, au revoir!"

"Âme de Voltaire," ejaculated M. Hervé, as we drove off. "Who would have thought that the making of a novel was so elaborate a process! Well, thank heaven, if geniuses have died out, we shall never suffer from a dearth of fiction, thanks to Château Roman!"

OGRES.

TIME was when the little boys and girls of this country believed in Jack the Giant Killer, Tom Thumb, Puss in Boots, the Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Red Riding-hood, and in Ogres. But that time has passed, and the little children, instead of being fed in their tender years on the sweet pap of fairy lore, are fed on the stronger food of the three Rs in the School Board, and on the "ologies" of science when the School Board relaxes its hold upon them, and consigns them to the drudgeries of everyday life. All the dramatis personæ of the fairy world are defunct or discredited in their minds, and even Harlequin and Columbine appeal in vain to the matured and sober taste of the young disciples of the Gradgrind school in this age and country, although they still hold their ground among the young people of other European nations. Even America knows not the impossible but charming personages of Fairyland, though the little men and women across the great Atlantic still retain, until they reach the venerable age of eight or nine, a faint belief, as Christmas and New Year approach, and for a few days

after their arrival, in a certain benevolent and bountiful Santa Claus, bearer of a marvellous stocking filled with chocolate-creams, and other goodies and knick-knacks, to reward them for having come into a world from which all, or nearly all, the poetry has departed.

"Ogres" are now seldom mentioned, though the word remains in popular parlance to describe a greedy and ruthless oppressor and tyrant. During the time of the First Napoleon—especially when he threatened the invasion of England—it was the custom to call that grim and too victorious potentate the "Corsican Ogre." The original idea of an ogre was that of a ravenous man-eating giant, which Napoleon the First indubitably was in a metaphorical sense; for he consumed thousands of men on the bloody battle-fields with which his name and exploits are inseparably associated. If he did not actually eat them himself, he made them vicariously the food of the powder which he so lavishly exploded all over Europe. Happily England, where he would have greatly enjoyed to have sacrificed to his lust of dominion a few thousands of our people, was exempted from his tender mercies, thanks to the brave and enthusiastic volunteers of the time, who kept the sacred soil inviolate, and would have made short work of the invader and his legions if they had but set foot upon it, and—

Found the full strength of them
Graves the full length of them.

The old Keltic, or Welsh giants, Cormoran and Blunderbore, were the beau ideals of the ogre in the minds of English children in past ages. The exclamation—

Fah! fee! fi! fo! fum!
I smell the blood of an Englishman,
Let him be living or let him be dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread—

has long been consecrated in the fairy mythology of the British Isles, to the remembrance of the Great Cormoran's exploits, happily ended, according to the long accredited tradition, by the sharp sword of the redoubtable little hero "Jack." The giant-killer seems to have been an Englishman, and to typify the pluck and daring of the race from which he sprang, and of which, though little, he was so great an ornament.

Etymologists, who are for the most part a very feeble folk, who seldom take the pains to think, and, whenever they do think are more likely to think wrongly than rightly, and who, finding an error in

existence, do their very best to perpetuate and extend it—are not by any means agreed upon the origin and first meaning of the word "ogre." Some of them derive it from the "ogurs," who are represented as a desperately savage horde of Asiatic people, who were said to have overrun a great part of Europe in the fifth century; others derive it from "Orcus," a man-eating monster, celebrated by Boiardo and Ariosto, forgetting, in their very superior wisdom, that "ogres" were the subject of fairy stories many centuries before the birth of either of these Italian worthies. Other equally learned pundits trace the ancient word to "Orco," one of the surnames of Pluto; or to "orcus," hell, the supposed place of his abode.

M. Littré, the author of the best French dictionary that has yet appeared, and infinitely superior to that much vaunted one which the world owes to the French Academy, and which was published more than a century ago—informs the learned that "ogre" is an Etruscan word, and that all philologists are in error who think it was derived from the Hungarian, and that ogre has any relation, either in fact or language, with Hungary. Worcester, in his American-English Dictionary, is not in agreement with any of his predecessors or contemporaries on the subject, and derives the word from one "Oegir," a giant in Scandinavian mythology. Jamieson, in his Scottish Dictionary, differs from everybody else, and describes an "ogre" and an "ogress" as giants with large fiery eyes, who fed upon children, and derived their names from the Icelandic "uggir," fear, terror, dismay,—a word of the same root, he thinks, as the English "ug" and "ugly." Other pundits remain committed on the subject, in the persons of Messrs. Noel and Charpentier, authors of an "Etymological, Critical, Historical, Anecdotal, and Literary Dictionary of the French Language." These gentlemen think that "ogre" may be derivable from the Greek "agrios," "savage," and add that in French familiar discourse, "ogre" signifies a great eater and devourer of victuals, not necessarily of children. To eat like an ogre is to eat greedily, and they quote from M. Boiste the following sentence: "How many things, how many books, how many events of all kinds are necessary to appease the hunger of that devouring ogre, the curiosity of the public!"

Who shall decide when so many learned doctors are found to disagree?

As the English and French languages do not help to a solution of the difficulty I shall try the German as a last resource, especially as the "ogres" are well known in the fairy mythology of the Fatherland. The German language, however, has not adopted the name, and renders it by "wehr-wolf"—the "loup-garou" of the French—the man-wolf and "lycanthrope" of the English, and by "menschenfresser," man-eater, and "kinderfresser," child-eater—that is to say, a "cannibal."

As the "ogres" took their rise in the imagination of our Celtic or British ancestors, the Kymri and the Gael, it might be well, before giving up the hunt after the origin of the word as altogether hopeless, to look into the Welsh and the Gaelic for a clue to the meaning. Possibly we may not look altogether in vain. In the modern Welsh—the ancient Kymric—we find that "ocri" signifies money, inordinate profit, forty or fifty per cent. interest on money lent—"ocriad," a usurer, a money lender, and "ocra," to practise usury. If there be any being in the shape of a man more akin in his nature, his practice, and his greediness, or more apt, ready, and willing to devour his creditor and all his substance than a professional money-lender, whether he be Jew or Christian, the world has yet to discover him. Perhaps, however, this is not the true derivation of the word, though it must be confessed that the explanation fits admirably, and I shall therefore try again the closely-related language, the Keltic-Gaelic, to find if possible a more satisfactory origin for the mysterious word, which has puzzled for hundreds of years so many erudite enquirers. I find that in the Gaelic spoken in the Highlands of Scotland and Ireland, "Ocras" signifies hunger, and "Ocrasah," hungry, greedy, famished. This, at all events, is a very near, as well as remarkable approach to the character of the fabulous monster of the fairy tales. I also find that in the same venerable language "Og" signifies young, "Og-fhear" or "Ogear" a young man, and "Oigridh" young folk.

Can it be that after all the awe-inspiring word was originally a very innocent one, and was first used by loving and over-anxious mothers to their innocent and inexperienced young daughters, to bid them beware of the "Orgeas," or young men, who went about like roaring lions in search of young virgins to ruin and devour, and that "Ogre" was only another name for a gay and heartless Lothario? I strongly incline

to the belief that this is the true key to unlock the mystery, and if any etymologist, philologist, or dictionary-maker can suggest a better, I shall be glad to have a hint of his discovery.

A MINING DISASTER.

A COMPLETE STORY.

THE sharp clangour of ironed clogs beating heavily on the pavement filled the keen frosty air. The shrill steam-whistles at the collieries and the parish church clock had just announced the hour of five a.m., yet many of the thoroughfares of Coalborough were alive with hurrying forms. With the exception of the street-lamps it was pitch-dark, for there was neither star nor moon visible, and the time was mid-November. Standing under a lamp-post one might have noticed that the faces of the men and lads who hurried past were strangely sallow, and many of them had bent backs and bowed legs. The majority of the men slouched along with sullen looks on their unintelligent faces, as though they bitterly resented the fate which forced them from home on such a cold morning. The lads were much merrier than their elders. Little dots of humanity of ten and eleven trudged on their way, some of them whistling, others singing, and all of them with hands buried deep in their breeches pockets and necks and ears swathed in rough woollen comforters. Here and there were to be seen early factory girls, their clean, long aprons seeming snowy white in the faint light.

Yet one miner at least went to work that morning with a bright face and a glad heart. This was Simon Broome, the man of whom this narrative is to treat. Simon was one of those strong-minded men to be found often enough amongst Lancashire pitmen. In a thousand miners there is perhaps one intelligent man; in five thousand there is one who is clever. Simon Broome was a miner out of five thousand. Going into the mines at nine, he had passed twenty years there; and when he entered his thirtieth year he was probably the cleverest pitman in Lancashire. Yet his natural ability, added to his wide experience of mining matters, had not profited him in a material sense. He had been a steady youth and sober man, always loving a book better than pigeon flies, dog fights, and wrestling matches. Whilst men of infinitely inferior ability—some of whom were unable to pen their

own names—had attained to official position as underlookers and managers, he still remained a hewer of the coal. His small progress was due to himself alone, as the following incident will show.

At twenty-five Simon had wooed and won a pretty schoolmistress, and just a week after his marriage he had lost his bosom friend, Jack Grant, who was crushed shapeless by a fall of roof in the mine where they both worked. At the inquest held on the body of his friend, Simon had the bad taste to disregard all the unwritten laws obtaining generally at such enquiries, and tell the truth. He proved that the mass of roof which killed poor Jack had long been known to be unsafe; that the various officials had been told time and again of its dangerous condition, yet persistently neglected to take steps to make it safe. Prior to the inquest the manager hinted that he had a good place empty, and that it was no use making a bad job worse. Simon preferred to tell the truth. He told it, sparing none, and what resulted? A jury, composed of tailors, grocers, shoe-sellers, and so forth, returned a verdict of accidental death, and no one to blame.

After this Simon's troubles began. When his married life was a fortnight old he found himself out of employment. Young, able, strong, and hopeful, his dismissal had caused him but little apprehension at first. His conduct at the inquest had attracted to him the attention and censure of the local mine-owners and officials. He found work at other pits, but he always got "bad places." He was subjected to all sorts of petty annoyances by the officials, and his earnings were too small to keep him and his comfortably. He bore his trials with a quiet dignity, striving manfully to live down the prejudice against him. But his pretty wife was delicate, children came, and the octopus arms of debt began to coil round him. At length the climax came. Although he had never smoked in his life, a pipe was found in his jacket pocket one day down the pit. He was summoned before the magistrates—one of whom was part owner of the pit in which Jack Grant was killed—and he was ordered to pay a fine of twenty shillings and costs, or suffer a month's imprisonment.

The fine was paid somehow, and then Simon, swayed by his wife, moved to Coalborough, to escape the persecution which had driven him from his native place, and obtain peaceful employment. Honest, hard-

working, and capable, possessing industrious habits and ambitious to rise, he found himself entering his thirtieth year in a strange town, almost moneyless, with a delicate wife and a couple of children dependent on him. The bitter curses that formed themselves in this poor fellow's brain obtained no utterance. He bore himself as a man should.

Coalborough is the centre of the Lancashire coal-field. There pits are deep and numerous. On the very day of his arrival in the town, Simon obtained employment. The following morning we saw him on his way to work, happy that he was in employment again, and hopeful that a few months of steady labour would set him on his feet once more.

A quarter of an hour's steady walking brought Simon to the Dutton Heath Collieries. Going to the lamp shop he obtained a lamp, then he made his way to the bank of the Arley Mine pit, where he was to work. The pit-bank was crowded with miners waiting to descend, and Simon sat on the edge of a full "tub," as the small pit waggons are called, until his turn came. An old grey-bearded pitman was seated on another "tub" close by, and from him Simon learned what price the miners were paid for each ton of coal sent to bank, and how much per yard was paid for driving "strett" places—"strett" being a Lancashire miner's synonym for "narrow."

Suddenly the bankman shouted "Anny moor gooin' deawn?" and Simon, with the few others remaining on the pit-brow gathered into the cage. "Le' down!" cried the bankman, and, with the rapidity of a falling body, the big iron cage shot down into the pit's black depths.

After stepping out of the cage at the bottom, Simon paused a moment, and a miner standing by came forward, saying: "Yo're o new un, a con see. Come this road and get your lamp examined."

Simon followed the man into the cabin, where the firemen were inspecting the lamps to see that no wires were broken in the gauzes and that each was securely locked. When Simon's lamp was examined and locked, the man, who had spoken before and who appeared to be an official of some sort, said: "Did th' gaffer sey wheeür yo' wur gooin'?"

"He said I was to go up the Britannia jig on the south side," replied Simon.

"Oh! Ah know wheeür yo' meeün. Hi! Bob Davies, show this chap that empty place next to Sam Cleck's." Turning to

Simon: "Gooä wi' this chap, he'll show yo' t' road."

Bob Davies turned out to be the old miner Simon had conversed with on the pit-bank, and they set off together along a level, going in that direction for half a mile or so, then they turned to the right and ascended an incline, or "jig," for several hundreds of yards more, and when at last Simon reached his working place the perspiration was rolling down his face, for the way along which he had travelled was so low as to necessitate much stooping.

Flinging off his outer garments Simon rested a minute or two to cool himself; then he rose and began to examine his new place as an incoming tenant examines a new habitation.

The Arley seam at Dutton Heath Collieries was worked on the "pillar and strett" system. In this method narrow headings are first driven to the boundaries, and then the rest of the coal is cleared out, working back towards the shaft, leaving the goaf behind. Simon's place was a "pillar," and along one side of his place stretched the old goaf. Lifting his lamp to the roof to see if it were safe and free from "breaks," he was astonished to see the light flare suddenly up.

"Gas!" he cried, and pulled down the flame of his lamp until there only remained a faint spot of light on the wick. Then there showed inside the gauze a long, pale blue luminous vapour, or "cap," as the miners termed it. Gently moving his lamp downwards the blue vapour disappeared, showing that the "firedamp" hung in a stratum about a foot thick along the roof. But moving towards the goaf he discovered that the "firedamp" thickened till it reached the floor of the mine, and the dangerous gas extended far back into the old "waste," where the extraction of the coal had caused the roof to subside in great masses.

The finding of the "firedamp" hardly caused Simon's pulse to quicken. He was fully aware of what would have happened had a single wire in the meshes of the gauze of his Davy lamp been broken. There was sufficient gas there to have destroyed every life in the mine had it been ignited, and a defective lamp, or even a perfect Davy in the hands of an inexperienced person might have caused a terrible explosion.

In every mine there are officials termed "firemen," whose duty it is to examine all working places prior to the miners entering them. When a place is found to

be unsafe through the existence of "firedamp" or other cause, it is the "fireman's" business to place a danger signal at the entrance to such place to prevent anyone entering it. Simon's first thought was, "Why had this precaution not been taken?" Then he asked himself if the "fireman" had examined that particular place on the previous night as he ought to have done. It would be an easy matter to prove this, for when a "fireman" visits a place to examine it he writes with chalk on some prominent spot the day of the month and his name or initials, to show he has been there.

Looking about the place Simon found a piece of board, on which were scrawled several dates and a man's name—"Ben Yetton." But the latest date was November the seventh, and it was now the sixteenth of that month; therefore, it was quite plain that this place had not been visited by the "fireman" for more than a week. Probably the place had been empty since the seventh of November, and the "fireman" had not troubled himself to examine a place in which no one was working. But Simon thought that this incident spoke clearly as to the character of the system of management in vogue at Dutton Heath Collieries.

About twenty yards further on Simon could hear another collier working, and to this man he went. As Simon approached the miner laid down his pick, saying:

"Is it thee that's gooin' t' start int' next place?"

"I should start, but there's a bit o' gas in it, an' I don't like workin' among it."

"Tha'll soon get used to workin' in it if tha stops heer. Th' owd sink is chock full of gas, but it doesn't matter as lung as it keeps away fro' t' face. Tha'll find some o'er tha yed if tha'll look."

Simon lifted his lamp to the roof, and again the gauze was filled with a pale bluish vapour. Dropping his lamp to the floor, Simon said, "It seems to make middlin' o' gas."

"It makes a good deecal, an' no mistake; 'nough to leet up every shop in Coalbro. That theer owd goaf aback o' thee is just meet like a gasometer. There'll be a rumpus some o' these days, if they don't mind."

"Don't they try to shift it?" Simon queried.

"Not um; they ne'er bother abeawt it. They care nowt abeawt a bit o' gas heeür, lad."

"It's not safe allus hangin' there," re-

joined Simon. "When a faw o' roof comes it's certain to sweep the gas afoor it, and then if there's anny bad gauzes abeawt there'll be an explosion, sure enough. I don't like th' thowt o' bein' roasted wick; does tha?"

"Not me; but we shall hev to tek eawr chance, I reckon," the miner replied philosophically, and he resumed his work.

"There'd be a bother, I think, if th' inspector happened to come and found men workin' so close to this gas. Th' manager would get fined, or sent to prison."

"Howd tha noise, mon!" the miner cried angrily. "The inspector, eh? What good are inspectors to us? I've bin workin' int' pit for thirty hears an' neer gotten a glint o' one o' 'em. Hast e'er seen anny o' 'em tha'sel'?"

"I've seen one once, when a mate o' mine was kilt," Simon replied.

"That's just it. Stable door's locked after the hawse is stown," the miner retorted fiercely, and he smote the coal with all his might to work off his passion. Then Simon returned to his own place.

Two or three weeks passed, and Simon's earliest impression as to the inefficiency of the management of the mine was verified. Through conversing with various miners who worked in different parts of the pit he learned that "firedamp" existed in many places, that the air-ways were in an awful condition through being neglected, and that blasting was permitted even in places where "firedamp" was common. No miner in the whole pit-set understood the danger, which was being incurred continually, better than Simon Broome did. Yet was he loth either to complain to the manager or other officials, or quit the mine altogether. He had suffered so much from outspokenness already that he longed for peace. He did not like leaving the pit, because his place had proved a good one. He was working regularly, and earning on an average forty shillings a week.

But the huge volumes of explosive gas lurking continually in the goaf filled his mind with incessant fears. Most of the miners seemed so habituated to the company of "firedamp" as to pay no heed to its presence; still there were others who feared the peril they were daily facing, and who, like Simon, did not like quitting the pit altogether on account of the good wages they were obtaining. And matters got worse instead of improving. Several of the miners urged Simon to write an anonymous letter to the Inspector of Mines for the dis-

trict, calling his attention to the dangerous condition of the mine; but he refrained from taking this step, because he held the belief entertained by miners generally that mine-owners and mine-inspectors were in collusion, and he knew of cases where men who had reported dangerous places had been forced to leave the district, as no one would employ them.

For the fearful condition of the Dutton Heath Arley Mine the management staff were not solely to blame. Most of the other pits belonging to the same owner were in the same neglected condition as the pit in which Simon worked, but being less gaseous they were of course safer. The owner of the Dutton Heath Collieries was Jonathan Bowles. He had been a pitman in his youth, and twenty years of industrious and adroit knavery had made him a mine-owner. To the outer public Mr. Bowles was a model man, and newspaper scribblers and amateur lecturers pointed him out as a sample of what might be achieved by perseverance and honesty. Only Bowles's workmen knew how hard and exacting he could be. To gain favour in Jonathan Bowles's sight there was only one way for the officials he employed at his pits. To raise plenty of coal cheaply was the one thing he desired, and the officials were told by the manager to cut down expenses as much as possible. Consequently everything went to the bad.

At last an unfortunate accident brought matters to a climax. Two poor fellows were burned to death by a small explosion of gas caused by a blown-out shot. This determined Simon and a few others who worked near him to leave the pit without delay.

They were carrying out their tools when they were met by the manager, a coarse, stubborn-headed fellow, named Dick Sampson, who, when he saw the men carrying their tools, exclaimed:

"Where are you taking those to?"

"Home," replied Simon, as the others were silent.

"And who gave you permission to leave without notice?"

"I think notice is not needed," Simon again replied firmly.

"Why?" asked Sampson, furious with anger.

"Because the pit isn't fit for a dog to be in, and you know it. There will be two hundred instead of two men burned to cinders before long if the pit isn't managed better."

"What's wrong?" Sampson cried, almost mad with rage.

"There's nothing right," Simon retorted. "I've been here three weeks, and there's been gas in my place every day I've worked, and in these men's places the gas has been nearly as bad. Yet, according to the reports made out daily by the 'firemen,' each working place in the pit was free from gas and in good working order."

"How do you know what reports the firemen make out?"

"The reports lie on the cabin table every morning, and I have glanced over them whilst having my lamp examined. I think you had better let us go without any more bother. I am afraid of my life every day, and will stay here no longer."

"If you don't take back your tools, and serve me with fourteen days' notice properly, I'll stop all your wages and summon you for neglect of work. Don't make fools of yourselves. I tell you the pit is as safe as can be—safe enough to use naked lights. I'll show you whether I think it is dangerous or not."

Without another word Sampson unscrewed his lamp, pulled a pipe from his pocket, lit it, and began to smoke. Simon and the other miners stared at the manager in speechless amazement. Scarcely fifty yards away was the spot where the two miners had been scorched to death only two days before, and the tobacco was glowing like a live coal. It was the act of a madman, imperilling every life in the mine, and was done out of sheer bravado. Doubtless Sampson thought his action would convince the miners that the mine was safe, and cause them to return. The naked light was beside the manager. Had a fall of roof occurred at that moment in any of the adjoining goaves a large volume of "firedamp" would have been swept on to the flame, and two hundred persons would have been destroyed instantly.

Simon Broome seemed turned to stone when he saw Sampson unlock his lamp and begin to smoke. But his stupefaction was of short duration. Then, without a word, he sprang forward, trampled out the naked light, and sent the pipe flying yards away, leaving the broken stem fast between Sampson's teeth. With a hoarse yell of rage the manager leapt at Simon, they closed, and rolled on the floor fighting like wild animals. Then the miners tore Simon from off Sampson and hurried him away.

The following morning the men belonging to the Arley Mine refused to go to

work, alleging that the pit was unsafe, and they declined to resume work until the mine had been examined by the Government Inspector, Mr. Shalford. The miners had been influenced to this decision by Simon Broome. So the pit lay idle for a couple of days, and the inspector was urged to visit the mine. On the afternoon of the second day a telegram came to the manager from Mr. Shalford, saying he was coming down on the 3.25 train.

Mr. Jonathan Bowles was waiting at the station with his carriage when the inspector arrived, and the coal-owner drove Mr. Shalford straight to the Arley Mine pit. Then the inspector, Mr. Bowles, and Sampson the manager, descended together. In half-an-hour they returned, and Mr. Shalford declared the mine quite safe, after which proceeding he went to dine with his friend, the owner of Dutton Heath Collieries.

The following morning the miners resumed work. On the afternoon of that day Simon Broome received two summonses, one for assaulting the manager of Dutton Heath Collieries, the other for neglect of work. Both cases were tried the same day, and each case was decided against Simon. None of the miners who had witnessed the affair between Sampson and Broome dared to give evidence against the manager, fearing persecution; and it was useless for Simon to plead that he left his work without due notice because the mine was unsafe, when the magistrates had before them a declaration signed by the Government Inspector of Mines, stating the mine to be quite safe.

So Simon was ordered to pay fines and costs amounting in the whole to five pounds, with the option of two months' imprisonment. The money could not be raised in time, and he had to go to prison.

Simon Broome's term of imprisonment would expire in a couple of days, and the town of Coalborough was stirred to its heart with excitement. Not, however, because the poor unfortunate miner was soon to regain his liberty, but because the election of a parliamentary representative was to take place on the morrow. The old member had died, and the candidates for the vacant seat were Mr. Jonathan Bowles, mine-owner, and Mr. Robert Robinson, cotton-spinner. The two candidates were the richest men in Coalborough, and each was determined to win, no matter at what cost. On the day of the election,

every one of Bowles's pits were idle, and all the mine officials, from "firemen" to manager had to canvass for their employer. Beer ran like water that day in Coalborough. To confirmed toppers it seemed like a glimpse of Paradise. Before night came, every one of Jonathan Bowles's officials were tipsy, for his return was certain. Yet two of these drunken officials had to go to work that night. These were Jonas Smith and Sammy Jones, both "firemen" at the Arley Mine pit. Their business was to see that the mine was all right and ready for the workmen in the morning.

Just after the poll had been declared in favour of their employer, these two "firemen" were seen staggering towards their work. Early next morning the shock of a terrible explosion was heard throughout the town. The Dutton Heath Arley Mine had exploded, and swept to eternity two hundred and ten poor souls, and amongst the doomed was the hot-headed manager, Dick Sampson.

Of course, the Government Inspector and the mining engineers soon formulated a theory to account for the terrible disaster. There had been a sudden outburst of gas, which had been ignited by a "blown-out" shot. But the miners of the district entertained a different belief. They believed that the two "firemen" fell asleep, being drunk, and did not wake till morning, thus failing to make their usual examination of the mine, and in the morning some poor fellow had walked into an accumulation of "firedamp," with a naked light probably, and sent himself and two hundred others to a premature tomb.

The terrible disaster struck sorrow to the heart of the nation. A wave of generous sympathy spread over the land. In a few weeks a score of thousands of pounds was collected for the bereaved. A so-called searching inquiry into the causes of the calamity was instituted. The Home Office sent down a legal gentleman to watch the case, and an independent engineer was deputed to examine the mine and report on it. But as this independent engineer depended for his livelihood on coal-owners, he was not likely to report unfavourably on the mine. What mine-owner would have employed him again had he stated that the mine was in a deplorable state, and that the explosion was due to bad management?

At the inquiry the inspector said he had been down the pit a few weeks before the explosion, and found it safe. In reality,

he was down the pit half an hour, and never left the pit bottom.

When Simon heard the sad intelligence his feelings were terrible. It was maddening to think that he had been sent to prison for leaving the doomed pit. The magistrates had ignored his plea, but his truth had been terribly vindicated. A few months afterwards he went to America, where he is now a prosperous citizen.

VICTIMS.

By THEO. GIFT.

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Etc., Etc.*

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TELEGRAM FROM LEAH.

AND the voyage was like a new phase in the dream. Fortunately Vera was not at all sea-sick, though Marstland, fearing that she might be, had taken the precaution to brace her against it with champagne and biscuits before starting; but either this acted as a preventive, or excitement and the fear of being overtaken took away all other sensations, and she passed the time walking up and down, leaning on her lover's arm; or, when the motion of the boat did not permit that, sitting in a kind of cushioned nest which he made for her, her hand fast clasped in his, and her slender form wrapped round with a multitude of cloaks and shawls to protect her from the cold breeze, while he talked to her and built a thousand pleasant castles in the air of all the things they would do and enjoy together once they were united.

Vera was still very nervous, however. Her eyes kept that curious, dilated expression which Marstland had noticed in them during their moorland tryst, and no persuasions that he could use would induce her to go and rest on one of the sofas in the cabin below, or even to turn her face from its straining gaze in the direction of the steamers, where every far-off sail, nay, even the white flash of a gull's wing, dipping on some distant wave, seemed to her like a pursuing craft gaining already on their path.

Marstland was very gentle with her. No brother, indeed, could have been more so; and though he had plenty of disturbing thoughts to agitate his own mind—the news of his sudden marriage to be broken and explained to his family, the wedded home yet to be established, the professional duties which he was even then ne-

glecting—one look into his betrothed's eyes, or at the nervous tension of the lines in her small, pale face, decided him on keeping them well hidden in his own mind rather than on attempting to lighten them by discussing them with her.

He had gone about the preparations for his runaway marriage with all the impetuous lightheartedness characteristic of him, trampling down every difficulty as it rose by his indomitable energy and the lavish use he made of his money, and ready to run any amount of risks for Vera's sake, and to set her free from the tyranny which was forcing her into a fate she abhorred; but for her sake, also, he was anxious to do so in such a way that not the slightest slur should rest upon her, and that therefore as few laws and conventionalities as possible should be broken in the performance.

He had done his best, as he thought, so far. Some of his original arrangements, indeed, had had to be put on one side and altered owing to the pressure of circumstances; and some of his precautions, which had seemed to him at first to be inspired by quite superhuman wisdom, struck him now, when the fruition of his hopes appeared so easily and so unexpectedly near, as not so wise after all; and he even began to regret a little that his high sense of chivalry had caused him to adhere with such scrupulous fidelity to Vera's entreaty that he would not endanger the success of their plans by any word or hint which could draw suspicion on them. He would have liked now to have been able to ask advice as to one or two trifling particulars, but after all they were but trifles. Even that little matter of the age, what was it but a question of a few hours more or less—a mere technicality. And even now, if he chose to make the sacrifice, or if Vera was making herself at all anxious or unhappy about it, he could obviate it altogether by delaying his happiness those few hours; postponing the wedding till the earliest possible hour on the following morning, and leaving his betrothed for the night in the care of his own landlady, while he himself went to the nearest hotel, or kept guard outside the house which would contain his jewel. He didn't like the idea. No man as much in love as Marstland would be likely to do so. He thought it a detestable one, and practically uncalled for; but when Vera had put herself into his hands with such meek, implicit trust, he felt that he was doubly

bound to show himself worthy of it by foregoing every thought or desire of his own rather than burden her with one unnecessary anxiety, one extra cause of nervousness. At first he said to himself, "Well, if she expresses a wish for it I will agree; but he knew in his heart that it was virtually impossible for a girl to express such a wish for herself; and so, after a tough inward struggle, he made the suggestion himself, and was immensely relieved by the look of startled dismay with which Vera regarded it. The promptness of the negative was delightful to him; though had he been a little less passionately in love there might have been something painfully suggestive of a narrow and even childish intelligence in the reasons with which she backed it.

"Oh, no, no, please!" she said, shrinking from him with a look of rather shocked propriety. "That would be staying a whole night away from home first; and I could not; it would not be proper or—*or* nice unless we were married; and mamma would never forgive it, I know. She would be ashamed of me all her life afterwards. She told me so."

"She told you so, dearest!" Marstland repeated, staring.

Vera nodded, her young face very grave and prim.

"Yes, it was not about us, you know, it was—some time ago. One of the English people who have settled on the other side of Quimper, and whom we had met at the chaplain's, wanted to make friends with us. She had two daughters with her, nice-looking girls, and I thought how pleasant it would be, but mamma did not seem pleased. She was very cold, and said that she was afraid that the distance was too great for visiting; and when they wanted me to stay with them for a few days so that I might be at a dance they were going to give, she declined, saying papa would not allow me to go to a dance without him; but next day she and Joanna were talking about it, and they said that at a water picnic two years before another of this lady's daughters had got separated from the rest of the party with the gentleman she was engaged to, and did not come home till next morning. They had gone to explore a little island on the river, but the boat got loose and drifted away; and, though there was a fisherman's hut on the island, and an old woman in it who was very kind to the poor girl, her husband and sons were away for the night fishing,

and so the two had to wait till their return to get to land. They were married quite a little while afterwards, but mamma said it made a great deal of talk, and was enough to ruin the girl's reputation for life; and that she should never have got over it or have forgiven either the girl or her husband if she had been Mrs. Deloraine. That was why she would not even let me know the younger sisters. She told me so, so you see," lifting her gray eyes with a shade of gentle reproach in them, "it would be quite impossible for me to do the very same thing with you, even if we were married next day."

"I see, my darling," said Marstland, well content with the decision arrived at, though rather amused that the sacrifice he had strung himself up to make for the sake of Vera's good name should be negatived on the same score. "All the same, there wasn't the very slightest real harm or wrong doing in the accident you describe, and I should have thought the mother who treated it as anything but an accident infinitely more disgusting than even the vulgar outside gossips, who make a talk of everything, whether there is a cause for it or not. Who, in the name of Heaven, should a girl trust to take care of her in any emergency if not the man who is going to be her husband? But you feel that, yourself, love," his face lighting with sudden pleasure, "for if you did not trust me you would not be sitting beside me now."

"Oh, but this is quite different!" said Vera, with a smile naïve enough to disarm anyone. "We are only out for a few hours on the sea as we might have been on the Thames at Weybridge. I think even mamma would say there is not much to choose between a river and the Channel; and you know when Naomi Lucas scolded me for going with you then, she said it would have been quite another thing if we had been an engaged couple, and—and we are engaged now."

"Thanks to Naomi's scolding, bless her for it, and your dear, little tender heart, love!" said Marstland, lifting the hand which he held to his lips for a momentary caress, which it was to be hoped the man at the wheel did not see. He could not help adding, however, in a tone of somewhat dry irony:

"Your mother, Vera, seems to have devoted herself to the study of that one text in the Bible, 'Refrain from all appearance of evil.' Does it ever occur to her, do you

think, that there is something in the world of equal or greater importance: real evil, for instance?"

Vera looked puzzled.

"I—don't know," she said simply; "I know she thinks girls should never do anything that is at all particular—I mean that does not look well. That is why I made you promise not to say a word to anyone but the Josephses about my going away with you. I thought if no one knew of it—if it were kept quite a secret——"

"As it has been, Vera," Marstland interrupted, glad now to be able to say so. "Even my own sister need never be aware, unless you wish it, that we have not been married in the most orthodox and fashionable manner."

Vera smiled.

"That is what I wanted to be able to tell mamma. I wanted her to see I had been careful this time. It is different with papa. He will never forgive me in any case; but it would be too dreadful if she did not either, for indeed, I am sure it is only to please him that she wants me to marry the Count; and, as she never actually forbade me to marry you, or even made me promise not to do so, it isn't as if I were breaking my word to her or setting her at defiance, is it? Oh, I couldn't have done that in any case! I felt I couldn't when you and Leah wrote, and wanted me to speak out and say plainly it was not possible for me to do as they wished. How can one resist one's own parents? I would rather have died. Indeed, I hoped I should, until—until you came."

"My poor little darling!" said Marstland compassionately. As once before when she spoke in a similar way, he did not know how else to answer her or what to do save stroke the slender hand he held in both of his. To his mind of course it was just the want of courage to be plain-spoken from the very beginning, which had got poor Vera into the complication from which he was determined at all risks to deliver her; but that, in doing so, he and she were not guilty of resisting her parents and setting them at defiance seemed to him an idea as absurd as that other one that, so long as people had not given you a formal order or exacted a formal promise from you, you were not guilty of deception in doing something by stealth which they tacitly relied on your not doing. For himself, Marstland hated deception in the general way from the very depths of his soul; but

there were occasions, as he argued, when any and every deception, however distasteful to you, becomes a necessary and unavoidable evil. Who, for instance, would blame a man who, taken prisoner and condemned to death or torture by some wily savage, manages to trick his barbarous captor by some "ruse," and make his escape through the aid of it? Yet who, for all that, would argue that the trick was not a trick, because there had been no formal parole; or extol the "higher honour" of a person who would take refuge from a direct lie in an equivocation or a "suppressio veri"? If either were needed, Marstland preferred the direct lie for himself; but he could only feel an infinite pity and tenderness for the poor little girl whose feeble arguments to the contrary were unfolded to him with such pathetic simplicity: an intense hatred and anger against those who had warped her natural candour by educating it down to the level of such low, pettifogging morality—the common morality (let us boast of our national truthfulness as we please) of the small British tradesman, who would not have false weights for the world, but weighs out his pound of well-damped sugar in the thickest paper procurable; or, having stamped a basket of eggs as "new laid," when they first came in, passes them off as such to a customer a fortnight later, before going prayers to his family with bland, self-conscious rectitude, or attend a Bible meeting at the chapel of which he is an earnest and professing member. Poor Vera could not at all understand why her lover should exclaim with such sudden, almost passionate vehemence:

"Love, in another couple of hours you and I will be man and wife. Promise me one thing first, sweetheart, promise it now, that when we are married you will never put a mask on any act or thought of yours for fear of anyone in the world—of me least of all! Do what you please in every way; you will please me best by doing so; but do it for love only—love of what you yourself think right and best, love even of me, if you will; but not for fear; never fear any more."

Vera laughed a little tremulously.

"George, you should have married Leah," she said. "You and she talk in just the same way; but then she is never afraid of anybody, and I—Oh! it is different with me. How should I know how to judge what is right and best? Mamma says I cannot. Indeed I would rather do as I am told—when I can."

The sun was getting low, but it was still a bright and lovely afternoon when, after a capital passage, they dropped anchor in the harbour of St. Peter-le-port, and the old dream-feeling came back to Vera with a rush as she found herself standing on the pier in a strange town, a strange island, all round her the friendly accents of the English tongue blending with those of France, and of a patois as barbarous as that of her own Brittany—on one side the broad blue sea crested with foam and spreading itself like a shield between her and her unkindly relatives; and on the other the clustered, red-roofed houses of St. Peter's crowding up a steep hillside in picturesque confusion, and all embowered and embloomed with the fresh green leaves, the pink and white blossoms of spring; all glowing and saturated with golden sunshine and sweet salt air.

She had gone down into the cabin just before they anchored and, by aid of the portmanteau packed for her by Bénéite before leaving, had changed her heavy dark dress and cloak for a light walking costume, refreshed herself with a good wash, and arranged her hair (by Marstland's special request) in such a way as to make herself look as venerable as possible. He told her laughing, that the result was quite appallingly successful, and that he felt as if he were going to be married to his grandmother; but both their hearts were now beating too fast for common speech; and between an awed sense of dangers happily over, and of the all-important ceremony before them, it was almost in silence that they walked up to the church where it was to be performed.

Not a very long or imposing performance! Not in the least like what either Vera or her lover had fancied their bridal would have been. There was not even any one in the church at that quiet hour of the afternoon save themselves, the curate who was to officiate, and who did so as rapidly as possible—having left a game of lawn tennis for the purpose—and the pew-opener and clerk, who acted as witnesses; and, though Vera would have betrayed herself a dozen times over to any one with half a suspicion of the facts of the case, by the way in which she trembled, started, and turned her frightened gaze from Marstland to the door at every slightest sound, he on the other hand was as cool and composed in demeanour as a soldier on parade, and gave his answers in a tone so firm and deep as to steady for the moment even Vera's

fluttering nerves. She only made one mistake. Her lover had thought it better in the first instance to give her name in its Anglicised rendering of St. Lawrence in order to avoid any possible question as to her different nationality; but Vera, as was natural enough, forgot all about this when the time came to sign her name, and was on the point of writing it with a "t" as usual, when a sharp cough from her watchful bridegroom recalled her to herself, and she finished the word in the mode they had arranged.

It was all over then. She was married, though she did not realise it in the least, and the formal congratulations of the curate ere he hurried away to fling off his surplice and return to the lawn tennis court, only made her lift her head in a kind of bewildered appeal to Marstrand; and then the intense pride and happiness shining in his, and those three words whispered as he kissed her trembling lips, "My precious wife!" brought the blood into her cheeks for the first time in a glow so deep that she was glad to turn away even from him to hide it.

It was only a few minutes' walk from the church to Marstrand's lodgings, a quaint little cottage, one of a row built on the side of a steep bit of hill, and separated from the dusty road by a high bank and stone wall, the latter enclosing a tiny strip of garden, bright at present with all manner of spring flowers; but, now that the fear of being overtaken had temporarily fallen into abeyance, the long strain on Vera's nerves and muscles began to show itself, and after they had entered the house, at the door of which the landlady was waiting to welcome them, and had passed into the little parlour, where supper was already partly laid out, she turned from the seat into which Marstrand would have put her, and burst into a flood of nervous tears, repeating again and again that she wanted Leah. Leah had promised she would always be her friend, would stand by her when she was married. Oh! was he sure Leah would not have come if he had asked her? Was he sure he had not asked her, because he knew she would be shocked to hear what they had done!

Marstrand soothed her as gently and wisely as possible. He saw that the poor child was utterly overdone, and remembering all that she had gone through in the last twenty-four hours for him, felt that it would be selfish and unmanly not to moderate his own transports until she was calmed and

rested. Again and again he assured her that he had only not taken Leah into his confidence from a dislike to compromising other people in a matter so important to himself; that he was perfectly certain, however, of her sympathy and pleasure when she should get the news of their happiness, and that perhaps Vera would have a proof of both sooner than she expected.

He said this smilingly, for in truth he had not waited for the wedding to be over to send off the tidings to Leah, but, wishing to give his little bride a pleasant surprise, had telegraphed to her friend on the morning of the previous day, telling her what he was going to do and when the marriage would take place, and begging her to send them a congratulatory telegram in answer addressed to the lodgings where they now were. He thought it quite probable, therefore, that the answer was even now waiting them in the bed-room, where the landlady had told him he would find a bundle of letters and papers, and though he did not say so to Vera for fear lest, in her hysterical state, a disappointment should only make her worse, he had no sooner soothed and reasoned her into calmness, and seen her lying back in the most comfortable arm-chair the room afforded, than he went off to the other room with a light heart to look for what he expected.

There sure enough was a yellow envelope, addressed to him, however, not to Vera; and as he tore it eagerly open, and scanned the contents, he congratulated himself on his caution on having said nothing about it beforehand. It certainly contained nothing of reassurance for Vera; but what could it mean?

This was what it said:

"Telegram received. Have you taken legal advice? If not, and still time to delay, entreat you to do so first. The marriage as proposed would not be valid. For Vera's sake don't be rash. Bring her here if necessary, or will go to her. Father writing you now. Very anxious."

Marstrand read the bewildering words again and again, the flush of excitement and happiness on his sunburnt face paling horribly as he did so. What could she mean? How could the marriage not be valid? True, there was that little matter of the age; but, little as he knew of law, he knew that, though the having certified falsely on this point might possibly get him into trouble, it could not, by the laws of England, invalidate the marriage itself, once the latter was regularly performed.

Was it merely an outburst of feminine ignorance and nervousness about such matters? But he knew Leah to be neither nervous nor ill-informed, and she had further said her father was writing to him. What rashness could they convict him of, he who had been so careful? Well, whatever it was, till he knew it, Vera was as safe in his hands as she could be in theirs; and as to the marriage, he was ready to repeat it twenty times over if needful. Of one thing only was he thankful; that he had not taken the telegram downstairs before opening it. He began tearing it in pieces at the mere thought.

But though he so far controlled his anxiety as to go back to his bride the next minute, and show her a calm and cheerful countenance, which was more reassuring to her than even his previous petting, he was very far from feeling calm in himself; and as they sat down to their first tête-à-tête meal—Vera opposite to him, her cheeks lovely with timid blushes, her sweet eyes expressing penitence in every glance for the tears they had just been shedding—his heart was sorely divided between passionate love and admiration for her and a frantic desire to find out whether he had made any mistake which could be twisted to her injury. He did not show it. He laughed, talked, jested, told her funny stories about his past life, and made pleasant plans for their future one: the theatres they would go to; the sights she must see; the visitor's room, which was to be called Leah's; the houseboat which they were always to keep for a holiday-home on the Thames; but at last his self-control gave out, and as soon as the meal was finished and cleared away he told Vera to lie down on the sofa and rest, while he ran to the post office (it was only just in the next street), and sent off the promised telegram to Leah to tell her of their marriage.

It was fortunate that he said this frankly, for only the prospect of hearing from her friend could have reconciled Vera to that of being left alone, even for ten minutes. She began to tremble a little even at the idea, and that made him the more averse to leave her; and he delayed some minutes shaking up cushions for her, bringing wraps to cover her, cautioning the landlady to let no one in to disturb her during his brief absence, and coming back twice over to say one more last word

or press a parting kiss on her sweet, soft lips. Nay, even then he could not hurry away, but at the foot of the steep little flight of stone steps leading down to the road turned again for a backward look, and so caught a view of his young wife's fair, pale face framed in the shadowy casement and wafting him a faint little farewell smile over the bright beds of tulips and crocuses, the sweet-smelling hyacinths, and red-gold wallflowers which filled the little garden. He kissed his hand to her twice with passionate fervour, and then ran off like the wind to the telegraph office, where it did not take long to dispatch the following message:

"Yours only this moment to hand. Married a couple of hours ago. What do you mean by not valid? Please wire at once. Cannot wait for letter. Trust me to care for her."

It had gone off, and he was already on his homeward way, when he remembered that such a message would not bring the congratulatory one Vera was expecting, and he turned back and sent off a second and shorter:

"Telegraph kind message to her separately. Her fond love to you. She knows nothing."

But this had caused a longer delay than he had bargained for; for in the meantime some other person had come into the office and had to be attended to; and when Marstrand at last succeeded in getting his business transacted, he was in too great a hurry even to return by the way he had come. The post office was in a street running parallel with that in which his lodgings were situated, but at a lower level. There was a piece of waste ground at the side, and it occurred to him that by climbing up this and crossing a large yard (the gates of which he could see standing open) belonging to some sort of factory, he would find himself in his own road and almost at the gate of the lodgings in a couple of minutes. He started off accordingly, and, having entered the yard in question, was dashing across it, when his foot caught in one of the numerous bundles of iron rods which strewed the place in conjunction with pieces of timber, casks, and other litter. He made a spring to avoid it, came down on something like a piece of wooden flooring which gave way beneath him, and fell heavily headlong.

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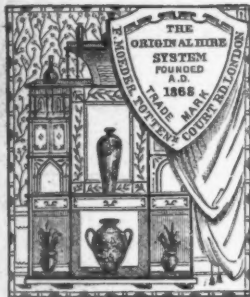
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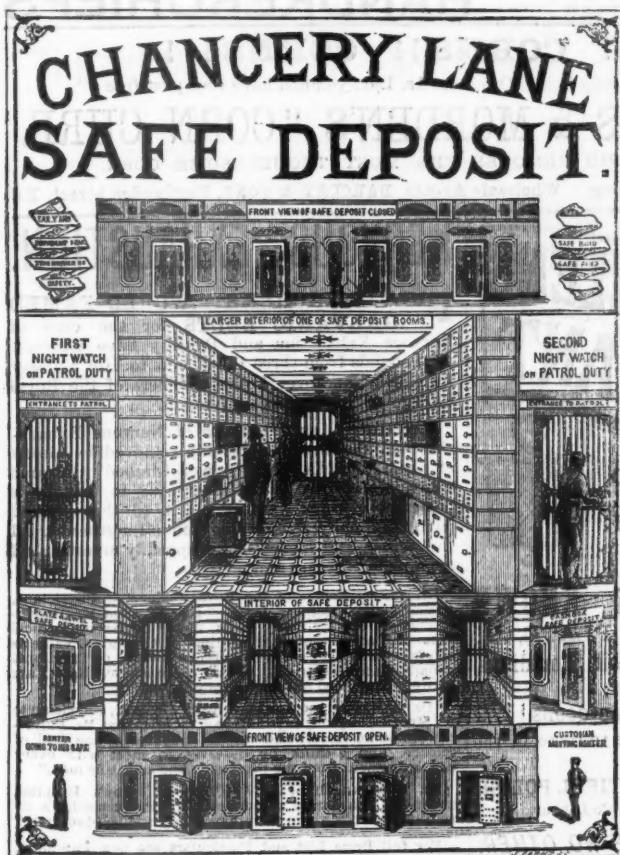
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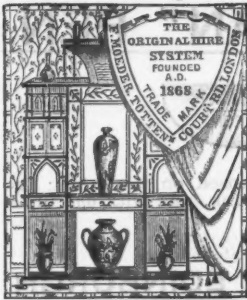
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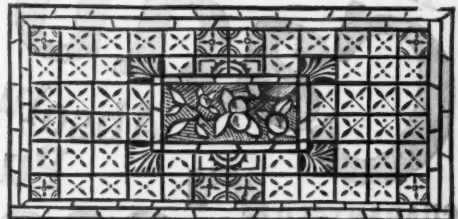
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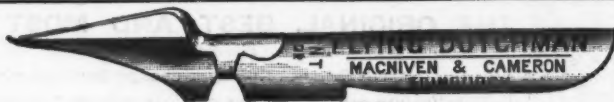
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